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1961/05/04

Narrative of Air Activity

1. On 8 April 1961 a briefing was conducted for the Deputy Director (Plans), Acting Chief, WH-4, and Acting Chief, DPD, which outlined the proposed plan of air operations for Project JMATE and Sub-Project JMFURY. Targets were as cited in DPD Air Operations Plan 200-1 with the exception that Targets 1, 2, and 3 were to be struck on D-3 as a portion of Project JMFURY. Project JMFURY involved target 1, San Antonio de Los Banos, two aircraft; target 2, Campo Libertad, two aircraft; target 3, Santiago de Cuba, two aircraft.

2. On 9 April the briefing team departed Washington for JMTIDE. The purpose of this trip was to brief the combat elements of the proposed plan of activities. After two days target study at JMTIDE, a recommendation was submitted to Headquarters which recommended assignment of three aircraft each to Targets 1 and 2. This change was effected.

3. On 15 April Project JMFURY was implemented with strikes occurring at dawn. A 24 hour delay received 13 April changed air strikes from D-3 to D-2. Results of that strike were believed to have been destruction of 70 to 80 percent of GOC's combat air capability. Damages sustained by attacking aircraft were as follows: one aircraft and crew destroyed by anti aircraft fire eventually crashing into the sea approximately 30 miles north of the Cuban coast attempting to reach Boca Chica Naval Air Station. One aircraft landed at Grand Cayman short of fuel. One aircraft landed at Boca Chica Naval Air Station, no battle damage had been incurred. The reason for landing at the Boca Chica Naval Air Station was due to this aircraft attempting to escort a crippled B-26 to Boca Chica which later crashed into the sea. The aircraft which landed at Boca Chica and Grand Cayman were eventually returned to the launch base.

4. On D-1 eleven targets were assigned the B-26 strike force designed to destroy the remainder of GOC operational air capability. Between the hours of 2100 local and 0100 local during the night 16-17 April the target assignment was changed prohibiting air strike of any airfields the morning of D day. All aircraft were committed to sustain air support over the beachhead area.

5. On D day 5 C-46's and one C-54 successfully dropped the airborne battalion at the appointed DZ's within the objective area. These aircraft returned to the launch base. B-26 aircraft were rotated over the beachhead throughout the day. The B-26 aircraft reporting the sinking of one gun boat, the destruction of one Sea Fury and one B-26, numerous strikes on ground

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targets and one C-46 aircraft by evasive attack caused an attacking Sea Fury aircraft to crash into the sea. Four B-26 were lost late on D day to enemy T-33 aircraft. One aircraft landed at Grand Cayman with one engine shot out. One aircraft landed at Boca Chica due to pilot fatigue. It should be pointed out that all Cuban air crews had at this point been up 36 to 48 hours without sleep. Thirteen (13) actual combat sorties were flown on D day. All sorties were in support of the amphibious landing on the beachhead. At this point it became clear that enemy air activity utilizing T-33 aircraft could destroy the more obsolete B-26 type aircraft with relative ease and a decision was made to attempt to destroy the remaining GOC aircraft at night on the ground through successful bombing raids. Six aircraft were scheduled to strike the main base of operations in two waves of three each during the night of 17-18 April. The aircraft aborted on take off. Heavy haze and low clouds prevented three aircraft from finding target and one aircraft attacked San Antonio de Los Baños.

6. On D plus 1 it became necessary to utilize American civilian pilots to protect the beachhead area due to the fact the Cubans were either too tired or refused to fly. Six sorties were flown during the afternoon of D plus 1. Reported damage by GOC sources indicated 1800 casualties and destruction of seven tanks.

7. On the morning of D plus 2 American pilots again were pressed into service for protection of the beachhead area for two reasons (1) the reluctance of the Cuban pilots to fly more combat sorties without air to air cover and (2) the Americans were attempting to build morale and develop a will to win. Two American crews were shot down with no survivors in the morning of D plus 2. Both aircraft were lost to T-33 aircraft. All sorties flown on the morning of D plus 2 were scheduled during the one hour period Navy air cover was supposed to have been provided the beachhead area.

8. In the afternoon of D plus 2 a radio message was received from the ground Brigade Commander stating that he was destroying his equipment and "heading for the hills". Upon receipt of this message all air activities in support of the beachhead area were terminated.

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